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NEWS LETTER

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LINCOLN ESSAY CONTEST
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THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

Springfield, Illinois, December 15, 1924

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Human-interest stories about Lincoln always are in demand at the time of his birthday. We have assembled the following to meet this demand. They have been taken from the authorities on Lincoln's life and condensed to meet the requirements of brevity. Your local newspapers undoubtedly will appreciate this little collection to which they are welcome with your and our compliments.

THE ILLINOIS WATCH COMPANY

Springfield, Illinois
The Home of Lincoln

HIS MECHANICAL GENIUS.

Lincoln possessed mechanical genius. With rude tools he built cabins and flat boats. Even in his public and professional life he often indulged in his mechanical dreams. In his navigation of western rivers, his craft frequently lodged on shifting shoals and bars. He contrived an apparatus of which a bellows was the animating principle. This bellows was folded to the hull of the boat; when occasion demanded, it was inflated for the purpose of lifting the craft over the obstruction. He whittled out a model which is now preserved in the patent office at Washington. A patent was issued to him but it is quite certain that the navigation of western rivers was not revolutionized by it.

THEY SAID HE WAS CRAZY.

Lincoln acquired much of his knowledge of the law by reading borrowed books under an old oak tree near Old Salem. Day after day and week after week he sat in the shade of this tree and moved as the sun shifted the shadows. One historian says that he was so much absorbed that some people thought and said he was crazy.

"I NEVER DRINK."

As a captain in the Black Hawk war, Lincoln regaled his soldiers with stories and jests. He recounted his adventures in Kentucky and Indiana and brought Aesop's fables down to date. Frequently his pleased auditors pressed their whiskey jug to him, but his invariable reply was, "thank you, I never drink."

LINCOLN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

A year before his election to the presidency and about the time his friends were thinking seriously of his nomination, Lincoln wrote a brief autobiography in the form of a letter to his friend, Jesse W. Fell, of Bloomington, Illinois, under date of December 20, 1859.

Because of its style, as well as of its contents, we reprint what he himself said of himself and of his family history.

"I was born, February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families — second families, perhaps, I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams and others in Macon County, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or 1782, where, a year or two later, he was killed by Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New England family of the same name ended in nothing more than a similarity of Christian names of both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

"My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union (1816). It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond 'readin'; 'writin'' and 'cipherin'' to the Rule of Three. If a straggler, supposed to understand Latin, happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age, I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the Rule of Three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

"I was raised to farm-work, which I continued until I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois and passed the first year in Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now, in Menard County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk war, and I was elected a captain of volunteers—a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went through the campaign, was elated, ran for the Legislature in the same year (1832) and was beaten—the only time I have ever been beaten by the people. The next, and three succeeding bi-

ennial elections, I was elected to the Legislature. I was not a candidate afterwards. During this legislative period, I had studied law and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846, I was once elected to the lower House of Congress, but was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig in politics, and generally on the Whig electoral ticket, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again. What I have done since then is pretty well known.

"If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said, I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on an average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair, and gray eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.

Yours truly,

A. Lincoln."

PAYING FOR A BOOK.

The copy of Weems' "Life of Washington" which young Lincoln read was borrowed. It was the only one in the whole neighborhood. Lincoln left it one day on a window sill. A rain soaked it and rendered it useless. The sorrowful boy took the ruined book to its owner and offered to work it out, as he had no money to pay for it. "Well, Abe," said the man, "as it's you, I won't be hard on you. Just come over and pull fodder for me, two days and we will call our accounts even." The offer was accepted and carried out to the letter.

HIS FIRST DOLLAR.

Lincoln was seventeen years old when he earned his first dollar. For several months in 1826 he was a ferryman on Anderson Creek at its union with the Ohio river. He took two passengers and their baggage to a steamer in the middle of the Ohio and received one dollar for the service. Telling a few friends about it in the White House, Lincoln said, "I could scarcely credit that, I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar. The world seemed wider and fairer before me".

FOR EIGHT DOLLARS A MONTH.

When he was nineteen years old, Lincoln became a hired hand on a river boat transporting produce from Gentryville, Indiana to New Orleans. His compensation was eight dollars a month and his passage home.

LINCOLN'S LITTLE LIBRARY.

"Young Lincoln's poverty of books was the wealth of his life" wrote one historian. The few he had access to he made a part of himself. He knew much of the Bible by heart, and all of Aesop's

fables, Pilgrim's Progress, Weems' Life of Washington, A Life of Henry Clay, A Life of Franklin and Ramsey's Life of Washington were his other books. From the Bible, Bunyon and Aesop he undoubtedly acquired style of expression and a wealth of wisdom. From Washington he learned the motives of the founders of the republic. In Henry Clay he saw a living man, great in national councils, whose origin had been as humble and poor as his own.

HUNTING A PLACE TO SLEEP.

Lincoln rode into Springfield, Illinois, on a borrowed horse. He had just received his license to practice law. Entering the store of his friend, Joshua F. Speed, he asked what a single bedstead would cost. Speed told him that what he wanted would cost seventeen dollars. "It is probably cheap enough," said Lincoln, "but I want to say, cheap as it is, I have not the money to pay. But if you will credit me until Christmas and my experiment as a lawyer here is a success, I will pay you then. If I fail in that, I will probably never pay you at all. Speed was so impressed by the melancholia of the young man that he offered to share his bed in the room above. Lincoln's face brightened as he went up to look at the room. Returning, very happy, he exclaimed, "Speed, I've moved". The two men occupied the room and bed for several years.

LEARNING HATRED FOR SLAVERY.

Lincoln reached his majority in 1830. Soon after this event, he accompanied a flat boat, he had helped to build, from Old Salem, Illinois, to New Orleans. He remained a month in that city, where he saw negroes "in chains, whipped and scourged". It was then that "slavery ran the iron into him". From a slave auction where he saw a mullato girl sold, he moved away with "unconquerable hate". "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing" he exclaimed to his companions, "I'll hit it hard."

HIS MODESTY.

Secretary of the Treasury Chase resigned after a disagreement with President Lincoln. The president was urged by his friends not to accept the resignation. They told him that Secretary Chase "was a national necessity". "How mistaken you are," observed the President. "I used to have similar notions. No! if we should all be turned out tomorrow and could come back here in a week, we should find our places filled by a lot of fellows doing just as well as we did and, in many instances, better."

LINCOLN'S COMPASSION.

Lincoln had just signed the pardon of a young soldier who had

been sentenced to be shot for sleeping at his post. Turning to a friend, he said: "I could not think of going into eternity with the blood of the poor young man on my skirts. It is not to be wondered at that a boy raised on the farm, probably in the habit of going to bed at dark, should, when required to watch, fall asleep; and I can not consent to shoot him for such an act."

LINCOLN'S MOTHER.

Lincoln's mother died, when he was in his tenth year. They laid her to rest under the trees near their cabin home. It is related that the young boy, grief stricken by his loss, sat upon her grave and wept for a long time. In later years, with tears in his eyes, Lincoln said to a friend: "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother—blessings on her memory". She was five feet and five inches tall, a slender, pale, sad and sensitive woman, of a heroic nature. Her death occurred in 1818, two years after her removal from Kentucky to Indiana.

HIS FAVORITE POEM.

Lincoln understood Shakespeare and frequently resorted to his plays for reading and recreation. His favorite poetry, however, was written by William Knox and was entitled "Why Should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud?" He had discovered this poem in a newspaper and had learned it by heart. It may be found in any collection of poetry.

LINCOLN'S FIRST LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE.

Lincoln's direct style of writing and action nowhere is better illustrated than in his letter accepting his first nomination to the presidency. It was dated at Springfield, Illinois, and addressed to George Ashman, president of the Republican national convention. It read as follows:

"Sir, I accept the nomination, tendered me by the convention over which you preside, and of which I am formally apprised in a letter of yourself and others, acting as a committee of the convention for that purpose.

"The declaration of principles and sentiments, which accompanies your letter, meets my approval; and it shall be my care not to violate or disregard it in any part. Imploring the assistance of Divine Providence, and with due regard to the views and feelings of all who are represented in the convention; to the rights of all the states and territories and people of the nation; to the inviolability of the constitution; and the perpetual union, harmony and prosperity of all, I am now happy to co-operate for the practical success of the principles declared by the convention.

"Your obliged friend and fellow citizen,

Abe Lincoln."

AS VILLAGE POSTMASTER.

President Jackson appointed young Lincoln postmaster at Old Salem. The position was too small to be regarded politically and Lincoln was selected, because he was the only man who was willing to take it who could make out the returns. He was very much pleased with the appointment, because it gave him an opportunity to read all the newspapers that were taken in that community. Since there was no revenue to be derived from the office, he made a postoffice of his hat and carried the village mail with him wherever he went. He kept the office until it was discontinued.

HIS LETTER TO MRS. BIXBY.

Regarded by many authorities on English as the finest composition in that language is President Lincoln's brief and tender letter to Mrs. Bixby on the death of her five sons in defense of the Union cause.

Executive Mansion,
Washington, November 21, 1864.

To Mrs. Bixby, Boston, Mass.

I have been shown in the file of the War Department a statement to the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I can not refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave only the cherished memory of the loved and lost and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,
A. Lincoln.

HIS DUAL WITH SHIELDS.

James Shields, later a general in the Union army, was auditor of public accounts of Illinois in 1839. He was the pride of young democracy, a dashing fellow and a favorite with the women. In 1842, The Springfield Journal published letters, over the signature of "Aunt Becca" who held the gallant young auditor up to ridicule as "a ball room dandy, floatin' about on earth without heft or substance, just like a lot of cat fur where cats had been fightin'."

Nobody knew who wrote these letters. They enraged Shields, whereupon "Aunt Becca" wrote other letters which added to his heat. The real author was Mary Todd, afterward the wife of Lincoln. He was in honor bound to assume the responsibility of her sharp pen. Lincoln accepted a challenge. The principals, with their seconds, were on their way to the field of honor, but were satisfied before they reached their destination and the duel did not take place.

LINCOLN, THE STUDENT.

Russell Goodby employed Lincoln as a farm hand. One day he surprised his employer sitting barefooted on the top of a wood-pile, attentively reading a book. Goodby demanded to know what he was

reading. Lincoln replied, "I'm studying". "Studying what?" asked Goodby, "law, sir" was Lincoln's emphatic reply.

HIS FIRST FEE.

Among Lincoln's first cases was one in which there was little chance of success but he did succeed with it and received a fee of five hundred dollars. "Why, I never had so much money in my life before," exclaimed Lincoln, as he counted it over in the presence of a friend. "I have got just five hundred dollars. If it were only seven hundred and fifty, I would go directly and purchase a quarter section of land and settle it upon my old step-mother" His friend loaned him the difference, taking his note for it and then advised him not to give the land to his step-mother outright but to settle it upon her for her use during her life time. To which Lincoln said: "I shall do no such thing. It is a poor return at best for all the good woman's devotion and fidelity to me, and there is not going to be any half-way business about it."

NOT FIT FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

Early in 1860, Lincoln was often mentioned for the Republican nomination for president. Though he was classed with Seward, Chase, McLean and other celebraties, any pride he felt in the association was artfully concealed. In all cases, he discouraged mention of his name in this relation. To one man who proposed it, he wrote: "I beg you will not give it further mention. Seriously, I do not think I am fit for the presidency."

THE UGLIEST MAN.

Lincoln related this story: "One day, riding on the circuit, I was accosted by a stranger, who said, 'excuse me, sir, but I have an article in my possession which belongs to you'. Lincoln wanted to know how that was. Then he continued; the stranger took a jack-knife from his pocket," 'this knife', said he, 'was placed in my hands sometime ago, with the injunction that I was to keep it until I found a man uglier than myself. Allow me to say, sir, that I think that you are fairly entitled to the property' ".

This story frequently is related to illustrate Lincoln's appreciation of a joke, even when it was upon himself.

AN OLD SIGN.

The day before Lincoln left for Washington to be inaugurated president, he visited his old law office and spent sometime in reminiscenses with his partner, William Herndon. As he was about to go he remarked, "Billy, you and I have been together for more than twenty years and have never passed a word. Will you let my name stay on the old sign until I come back from Washington". With tears in

his eyes, Mr. Herndon replied: "Mr. Lincoln, I will never have any other partner while you live." The firm remained Lincoln & Herndon and its business was transacted under that title until Mr. Lincoln's death.

PRESIDENCY NOT A BED OF ROSES.

An intimate friend from Springfield found President Lincoln much depressed. Mr. Lincoln arose from his sofa and said, "you know better than any man living that, from my boyhood up, my ambition was to be president. I am president of one part of this divided country, at least; but look at me! Oh! I wish I had never been born. I've a white elephant on my hands, one hard to manage. With a fire in my front and rear to contend with, the jealousies of the military commanders and, not receiving that cordial cooperative support from congress that could reasonably be expected with an active and formidable enemy in the field threatening the very life blood of the government, my position is anything but a bed of roses."

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